

Abbott drops lawsuit, maintains deadly blockade **Activists call Abbott to reason, predict more netstrikes**

Today July 22 2007 in Sydney, Australia, at the initiative of people with HIV/AIDS from Thailand and France, Abbott CEO Jean-Yves Pavée participated in a meeting meant to resolve the crisis in which the company has dug itself in Thailand. Yet, during the meeting, Abbott refused to lift the deadly blockade of its lifesaving HIV medication Aluvia which the company is currently exerting against Thai people with AIDS.

On July 13, the Thai Network of People living with HIV and the French HIV+ group Act Up-Paris issued a joint press statement calling upon Abbott Laboratories to attend a crisis resolution meeting at the International AIDS Conference in Sydney. This meeting was meant to offer Abbott an opportunity to get out of the crisis in which it has been embroiled since its February 14 announcement of a blockade of its HIV medicine Aluvia against all Thai AIDS patients.

“I’m living with HIV, and a few years ago an HIV drug by Abbott saved my life” recalls Act Up-Paris president Hugues Fischer. “From my point of view, for Abbott to be deliberately preventing the Thais from procuring a lifesaving HIV medicine is tantamount to murder. Abbott must drop its blockade now – to merely drop its lawsuit against Act Up-Paris is almost besides the point”, insists Hugues, referring to the lawsuit filed by Abbott on May 23 against French HIV+ Act Up-Paris group, in reprisals for the international internet demonstration which Act Up-Paris convened on the Abbott website on April 26.

“By dropping its lawsuit against people with HIV in France, Abbott Laboratories are only demonstrating that right is on the side of people with AIDS, and that Abbott’s blockade against us in Thailand is morally untenable”, comments Wirat Purahong, president of the Thai Network of People living with HIV. “Access to Aluvia for Thai AIDS patients is a thousand times more important than access to Abbott’s corporate website. Abbott must drop its blackmail that Thai AIDS patients will only get Aluvia once the Thai government has granted Abbott a monopoly”, he adds.

The international AIDS activist community will keep up the fight to ensure universal access to HIV medicines in spite of drug company greed. Act Up-Paris and TNP+ therefore predict further netstrikes by the international AIDS activist community on the Abbott website, until the company respond to people with AIDS’ call to reason that Abbott drop its current deadly Aluvia blockade against Thai positive people.

Contacts:

Sydney: Khalil Elouardighi, Act Up-Paris, +33 6 6315 3882

Bangkok: Brigitte Tenni, Thai Network of P+, +66 8 5133 4530

Paris : Jérôme Martin, Act Up-Paris, +33 6 8447 2092

Background: On February 14, Abbott announced that, until the Thai government grants Abbott a long-term monopoly on sales of the lifesaving HIV medicine Aluvia, Abbott was effecting an immediate blockade on the distribution of this lifesaving drug to all HIV/AIDS patients in Thailand. This came in reprisals for the Thai government's decision of January 29 2007 to open the Thai market for HIV drug lopinavir to generic competition, based on a legal mechanism of the World Trade Organization.

On May 23, Abbott Laboratories, a 22 billion dollar company, announced having hired the world's biggest law firm, Baker & McKenzie, to sue the French HIV positive group Act Up-Paris, for having convened an international internet demonstration on the website of Abbott, in protest against Abbott's blockade of lifesaving AIDS medication in Thailand.

More and more financial and mass media are reporting on the disastrous impact that the Abbott blockade is having on the lives of impoverished Thais struggling with the AIDS virus (see Reuters story of May 22). These media reports have caused Abbott's blockade to snowball into a public relations crisis which is further staining the reputation of the entire patent-based pharmaceutical industry (see comments by GlaxoSmithKline in Wall Street Journal of June 18).